

## Zahradníček's blog for English speaking students

### Part eighteen: Masaryk, or Mendel?

It is already more than ten years ago, when a student asked me: Why does Masaryk university such a stupid name? Semmelweis university in Budapest, that is a name! Semmelweis brought asepsis in obstetrics, that has been a scientist! But Masaryk, just a president, a politician... politicians should not be people giving names to the universities! Masaryk university should rather have a name after a scientist, like Johann Gregor Mendel!

OK, let me tell some words concerning Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk, or simply "TGM", a quite common abbreviation. First of all, he was not "just a president", but his importance was much bigger than that; his personal influence and negotiations with U. S. President Woodrow Wilson played the crucial role in the decision that after disruption of Austro-Hungarian empire, Bohemia and Moravia should make one country together with "Upper Hungary", that means, today's Slovakia, and also Carpathian Ruthenia, now a part of Ukraine. His personal charisma imprinted the character of the new country: democratic, industrial, friendly to new architecture (such as functionalism), and simply modern. Masaryk was for Czechoslovakia (and still, Masaryk *is* for Czechia) about the same as Mustafa Kemal Atatürk for Turkey. It is mainly because of Masaryk and his collaborators that Czechoslovakia resisted very long time to become a right-wing or even Nazi country, and in late 30s it become a refuge for independent writers and politicians from Germany and other countries; of course, after occupation of peripheral parts of Czechoslovakia in 1938 and the remaining part in 1939, all this finished. Nevertheless, "TGM" ideals remained living inside.

But all this is not the correct answer for the student. In the matter of fact, the student was mistaken. Long years *before* Masaryk became a president, he had been already a university professor, although not in medicine or biosciences, but in sociology. And what can be also seen as a big message from Masaryk to recent times: he refused to falsify the Czech history just „to make it bigger“; and he also fought against xenophobia based on hoaxes. He played a big role in the investigation of a murder of a young Czech girl Anežka Hružová: many people believed that it had been a ritual murder committed by a young man called Leopold Hilsner – a Jew. Masaryk showed a clear evidence that Jewish religion is absolutely incompatible with any idea of such a ritual murder, and he insisted saying this even if many people hated him (antisemitism was quite common in Central Europe around the year 1900). TGM was born in Hodonín, South Moravia, and he also studied several years in Brno, so he belongs to that region.

Of course, Johann Gregor Mendel, genial inventor of genetics, would be also a very suitable personality, but his name has another university – Mendel University (MENDELU), also in Brno, with five faculties (Faculty of AgriSciences, Faculty of Forestry and Wood Technology, Faculty of Business and Economics, Faculty of Regional Development and International Studies, and Faculty of Horticulture that is localised in Lednice). Another big personality of Brno, musical composer Leoš Janáček, gave his name to the Janáček Academy of Music and Performing Arts in Brno (with the Faculty of Music and the Theatre Faculty). – Remaining public universities in Brno have no personalised name. First of them is the Brno University of Technology. It has eight faculties, that means Masaryk University has only one more. These faculties are the Faculty of Civil Engineering, the Faculty of Mechanical Engineering, the Faculty of Electrical Engineering and Communication, the Faculty of Architecture, the Faculty of Chemistry, the Faculty of Business and Management, the Faculty of Fine Arts and the Faculty of Information Technology. Some of them closely cooperate with the Medical Faculty of Masaryk University, especially on the field of biomechanical science and electronic equipment of the hospitals. The second is the University of Veterinary and Pharmaceutical Sciences Brno with the Faculty of Veterinary Medicine, Faculty of Pharmacy and the Faculty of Veterinary Hygiene and Ecology. The last one is the University of Defence in Brno with its Faculty of Military Leadership, Faculty of Military Technology and Faculty of Military Health Sciences. There exist also some private universities in Brno, so the city is really a „city of students“. Student associations help students of different universities to meet at *Majáles* in May, but also in the ice-hockey competitions and many others.